

## Chapter 2



Ian Drew/USFWS

*Harper's Meadow with loon*

## Planning Process

## **The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process**

Service policy establishes an eight-step planning process that also facilitates our compliance with NEPA (figure 1.1).<sup>1</sup> Details on each step in the process are available on our website at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/>. We describe below how we followed that process in developing this CCP.

In 2001, we began to prepare for developing this CCP by collecting information on refuge resources and mapping its habitats. We convened our core team, which consists of refuge staff, regional office staff, and representatives of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) and the New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG). We discussed management issues, drafted a vision statement and tentative goals, and compiled a project mailing list of known stakeholders, interested individuals, organizations, and agencies. We also conducted a wilderness review, evaluated wild and scenic rivers potential, and summarized our biological inventory and monitoring information. We initiated all of those steps as part of “Step A: Preplanning.”

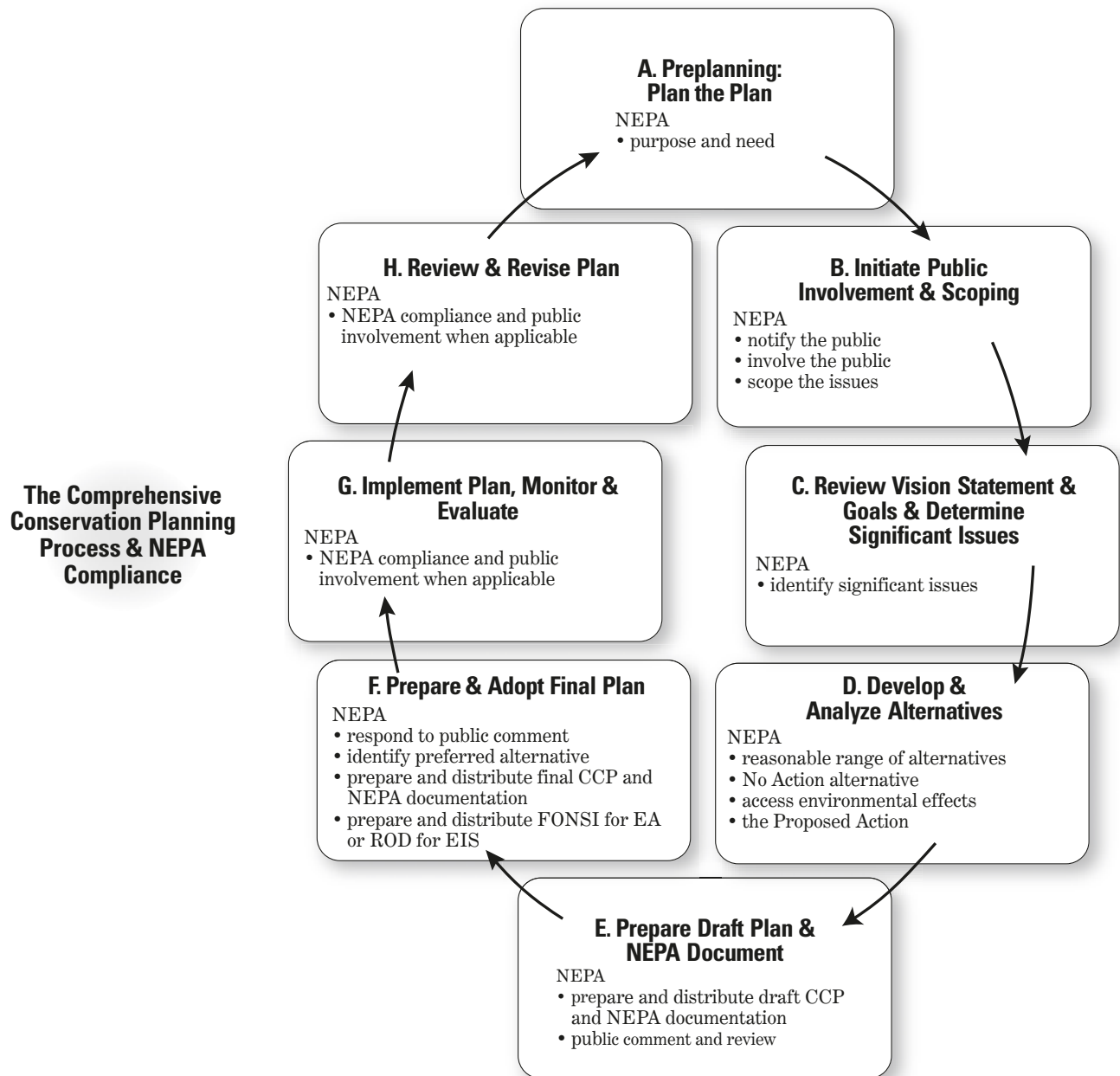
In August 2001, we initiated “Step B: Initiate Public Involvement and Scoping” by distributing a newsletter to announce that we were beginning the planning process and ask if people wanted to be on our mailing list. In June 2002, we distributed approximately 1,000 copies of a Planning Newsletter and Issues Workbook to everyone on our mailing list. Those workbooks asked people to share what they valued most about the refuge, their vision for its future and the Service role in their community, and any other issues they wanted to raise. We received 131 completed workbooks.

On July 16, 2002, we formally announced the start of the planning process in a Federal Register Notice of Intent. During that July and August, we held eight public scoping meetings to identify public issues and concerns, share our draft vision statement and tentative goals, describe the planning process, and explain how people could become involved and stay informed about the process. We announced their locations, dates, and times in local newspapers and special mailings. More than 115 people attended. Those meetings helped us identify the public concerns we would need to address in the planning process. We also solicited public issues and concerns at our booth at the August 2002 Umbagog Wildlife Festival (see Figure 2.1).

We worked on “Step C: Review Vision Statement, Goals, and Identify Significant Issues” and “Step D: Develop and Analyze Alternatives” concurrently in 2003 and 2004 in two technical workshops: one on upland forest habitat management and one on wetlands management. We invited resource professionals and scientific experts to share their opinions on the significance of refuge resources, namely, their assessment of the health, diversity, and integrity of its habitats. We also met with elected officials, our state partners, and other Service divisions to apprise them of the status of the project and exchange technical information. For much of 2004 and into 2005, we compiled and analyzed various management alternatives to serve as the foundation for developing the Draft CCP/EIS. In August 2005, we distributed a newsletter summarizing the alternatives in detail and updating our planning timeframes.

Also in 2004 and into 2005, the USGS Fort Collins Science Center helped us develop and implement a stakeholder survey to provide us with information on public satisfaction, preferences, and expectations regarding our current and proposed refuge management. The final survey report provided valuable information for our management proposals. We distributed an Executive Summary of the results in November 2005. You may request the full report from refuge headquarters in hard copy or CD-ROM, or view it online at <http://www.fort.usgs.gov/products/publications/21507/21507.asp>.

<sup>1</sup> 602 FW 3, “The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process” (<http://policy.fws.gov/602fw3.html>)



**Figure 2.1. The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process**

We completed “Step E: Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA document,” by publishing a Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register on July 6, 2007, announcing the release of the Draft CCP/EIS and distributing it for public comment. During the 77-day period of public review from July 6 to September 21, 2007, we held public hearings to obtain comments. We received over 14,000 comments by regular mail, electronic mail, and as testimony in those public hearings. We reviewed and summarized all of the comments and developed responses to them. A summary of public comments and our responses to them are presented in appendix O of the Final CCP/EIS.

We released our Final CCP/EIS for a 32-day public review period from. Its availability was announced in a NOA in the Federal Register on December 3,

2008. After the public review period, we then prepared a Record of Decision (ROD) for our Regional Director. He approved and signed the ROD on January 9, 2009, completing the planning process. We then announced the availability of the ROD in another NOA in the Federal Register on March 16, 2009, completing “Step F: Prepare and Adopt a Final Plan.”

We have now begun “Step G: Implement Plan, Monitor and Evaluate.” We will modify this CCP following the procedures in Service policy (602 FW 1, 3, and 4) and NEPA requirements as part of “Step H: Review and Revise Plan.” Minor revisions that meet the criteria for categorical exclusions (550 FW 3.3C) will require only an Environmental Action Memorandum. We must fully revise CCPs every 15 years.

## Issues, Concerns and Opportunities

From our Issues Workbook, public and focus group meetings, and planning team discussions, we developed a list of issues and concerns which focused our development and analysis of alternatives evaluated in the draft and final CCP/EIS. We summarize them again below as they remain important to us while we implement the plan.

**Significant issues.**—Our partners or the public brought these issues to our attention during the scoping process. These discussions generated a wide range of opinions on how to resolve them, summarized below. We applied those in creating the primary distinctions among the objectives and strategies in each alternative in chapter 2 of both the Draft and Final CCP/EIS. Ultimately, their resolution was key in selecting which actions to include in the CCP.

**Other issues and management concerns.**—These issues are narrower in scope or interest compared to the significant issues, but they still generated a range of opinions.

**Issues and concerns outside the scope of this analysis.**—The resolution of these issues fell outside the scope of the purpose of and need for action as we described in the Draft and Final CCP/EIS. They are identified below, but will not be further addressed in this document.

## Significant Issues

Addressing the 11 significant issues below helped define the actions to best achieve the seven goals above.

### *1. Which wetland habitats and wetland-dependent species should be management priorities? How will we manage for them on the refuge?*

Because one of the purposes for establishing the refuge is to conserve wetlands, addressing this issue is a high priority. It is also a challenge. The water levels in Umbagog Lake directly influence most of the refuge wetlands. The holder of the FERC license controls those water levels, which fluctuate according to releases at Errol Dam. The current licensee, Florida Power and Light-Energy (FPLE), meets with the Service annually, as required by its license, to agree on water levels in June and July when birds are breeding and nesting.

To offset our limited direct influence on water levels, some input we received recommends we manage refuge wetlands by planting wild rice, promoting beaver activity, reducing or eliminating external threats of erosion or pollution, controlling access to wetlands, and eliminating invasive species. We believe, as do wetland experts who provided input on this issue, that managing water levels more effectively throughout the year would improve habitat quality for species of conservation concern and other wetland-dependent native species, and sustain such unique wetland types as the Floating Island National Natural Landmark (FINNL).

Those recommendations vary considerably on the timing, extent, and focus of wetlands management. Some suggest we establish more baseline biological information before we manage the refuge wetlands. Others suggest we first work with the current holder of the FERC license, to discuss a year-round regime of water levels that will be more beneficial for wildlife and wetlands. As in any aspect of refuge management, our decisions on managing refuge wetlands could benefit one species of conservation concern, but adversely affect another.

*2. Which upland forest habitats and forest-dependent species should be management priorities? How will we manage for them on the refuge?*

The decision document establishing the refuge (USFWS 1991) also recognizes that its upland forests play a crucial role in conserving the lake, its rivers and associated wetlands. This document recognized that the refuge was part of a larger conservation partnership to protect and manage timber, wetland, and wildlife resources of the Umbagog area. Conservation easements held by the State of New Hampshire on some of the upland portions of the refuge specifically granted timber management rights.

Uplands compose at least 58 percent of the refuge. During the last 10 years, we acquired much of that upland forest from timber companies who harvested it intensively before selling it to the Service. The vegetation now growing back on some of those areas lacks the natural species diversity, age-class distribution, and structural components of healthy native forests in the Upper Androscoggin River watershed.

Only in the last 5 years have we acquired enough contiguous forested upland to form efficient management units. Primarily for that reason, we have not managed the vegetation on those lands. During our public scoping, many people encouraged us to manage those areas to bring them into a more natural, healthy forest condition. Some would like us to manage the upland forests on the refuge exclusively as working forests to promote tree growth and productivity for commercial purposes. Others would like us to initiate some action to get those areas on a natural path sustainable without further human intervention. Some suggested we focus our management on benefiting species that depend on upland forest habitats, particularly, migratory songbirds that regional and state conservation plans have identified as conservation concerns in the last 5 years. Some of those species require mature forest stands, while others prefer a mix of age classes and types. Again, our management decisions could benefit one species of conservation concern but adversely affect another.

Other individuals and organizations encouraged us to expand the refuge as a means of conserving large areas of undeveloped forest lands to benefit species that require contiguous interior forest habitats. Still others expressed an interest in our conducting very little to no active vegetation management in the uplands. Some believe “nature should take its course,” and that the forested areas will recover without our help.

*3. What is the appropriate level for each of the six priority public use programs on the refuge? What means of access will we allow for those activities?*

The Refuge Improvement Act does not establish a hierarchy among its six priority, wildlife-dependent compatible uses. At times, they may conflict. At other times, the refuge may lack sufficient resources to promote all of them equally. Some people expressed concerns that we may allocate refuge resources disproportionately toward one use to the detriment of another. Service policy authorizes the refuge manager to allocate time and space for those uses to reduce



conflict, or terminate or disallow one or more of them. The refuge manager must evaluate, among other things, which use most directly support the long-term attainment of refuge purposes and the Refuge System mission.

During the public scoping process, we heard from many people concerned about a rising number of conflicts between visitors in motorboats and visitors in canoes and kayaks. Both groups typically are involved in priority public uses such as fishing and wildlife viewing. Those promoting motorboats suggest limits on the number of kayakers and canoeists or the size of groups, because the increase in large group trips affects the ability of motorboats to maneuver on the river corridors. Those promoting kayaks and canoes voice their concern over the noise and speed of motorboats disturbing wildlife and affecting viewing opportunities. They also express concern about their own safety, because of the wakes motorboats create. Some motorboat operators suggest that kayakers and canoeists could create more wildlife disturbance by their access to small, quiet coves where some wildlife hide or rest.

Unfortunately, we get reports each year of verbal confrontations between users of motorized and non-motorized boats. Although we cannot prevent all such encounters, our enforcement focuses on people operating boats in a reckless manner, or in a manner that endangers or is likely to endanger any person, property or wildlife.

An additional challenge for the refuge manager and our state partners is determining the capacity of the refuge and the lake to support these priority compatible uses and still provide visitors with a quality experience. We also need to be aware of their impacts on adjacent lands. Several landowners expressed concern that increased boating has increased trespassing onto private land. Boaters have left behind trash and human waste, and have parked or camped where they do not have permission.

#### *4. How will we manage furbearer populations?*

The term “furbearer” includes all mammals that possess some form of hair (TWS 2001). However, we use the term to identify species hunted or trapped for their fur, including carnivores and rodents. Beaver, bobcat, coyote, fisher, fox, marten, mink, and muskrat are common furbearers on the refuge. Furbearer populations are dynamic; many are capable of doubling their populations in a single year, while others are more subject to limiting habitat factors. For example, muskrat populations can fluctuate dramatically each year. They can decline by 75 percent in the winter and rebound completely by the next fall (TWS 2001). As land managers, we become concerned when furbearer populations meet or exceed the biological carrying capacity of refuge habitats.

The complex subject of furbearer management is also controversial at the national and state levels. Most of the controversy surrounds regulated trapping. We heard from people who object only to certain trapping methods, particularly the foothold trap on land. However, other opponents have moral and ethical objections to killing animals, and do not support any form of trapping.

We also heard from proponents of regulated trapping who believe it provides an important, effective method for managing furbearer populations, is a sustainable use of wildlife resources, and allows for a rural, self-sufficient, subsistence lifestyle of historical significance in the Northern Forest. Supporters acknowledge the Refuge System mission to conserve, protect, and enhance viable populations of native wildlife such as furbearers, but contend that harvesting some furbearers does not threaten the continued survival of their populations

(TWS 2001). They often compare it to our hunting and fishing programs in that regard. However, trapping is not one of the six priority public uses in the Refuge Improvement Act.

*5. How will we manage compatible, non-priority recreational uses on the refuge?*

We heard from people supporting certain non-priority uses that they claim have historic precedence in the area. Others expressed opposition to these same uses. Most frequently discussed during public scoping were (1) snowmobiling, a very popular recreational activity, and increasingly important to the local economy; and, (2) furbearer trapping, a recreational activity with cultural and historic roots in the region. Other activities mentioned were bicycling, horseback riding, dog-sledding, and collection of antler sheds.

All uses on a refuge are subject to a finding of appropriateness and a compatibility determination by the refuge manager before they can be allowed. For non-priority activities to be allowed, they would also have to be managed so they do not conflict with the goals and objectives for biological and visitor services priorities in the CCP, are consistent with laws and policy, ensure public safety, and are manageable within the limitations of the refuge budget and available staff. If a priority and non-priority public use conflict, the priority public use will take precedence (603 FW 2). Some people we spoke with argued that these non-priority uses activities detract from our ability to provide priority public uses. They pointed out the limited refuge staff and annual funding of recent years, and did not believe we can manage these activities properly in addition to higher priority programs. Others simply stated they do not believe these activities are appropriate for a national wildlife refuge. That opposition ranged from those opposed to certain activities on ethical and moral grounds, to those concerned with visitor safety and those concerned with direct impacts on wildlife and habitats. We also heard from individuals who support many of these activities.

*Snowmobiling  
on the refuge*



*6. How will we manage camping in remote areas on the refuge?*

A developed campground in Umbagog Lake State Park on the south end of the lake is accessible by car from Route 26. The park also includes 30 remote camping sites around the lake, all seasonally open and administered

by the State of New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development (NHDRED), Division of Parks and Recreation. Fourteen of those camping sites are on refuge lands; of which 12 are on the lake, and 2 are on rivers. Our ongoing partnership with the state to conserve Umbagog Lake is a very successful, valuable relationship that facilitates wildlife conservation and provides unique recreational opportunities in the Northern Forest. The remote camping sites are extremely popular, and are consistently occupied during the open season. We hear from many people that the highlight of their trip is the opportunity to hear and see loons calling near the campsites at dusk and dawn.

Although we heard from individuals who advocate maintaining camping at its current level, we did not hear from anyone who recommended increasing the number of sites. Some, who expressed support for camping in general, would like to see a reduction in the total number of sites because they are concerned about the total number of visitors to the area, and believe camping encourages group activities. Others felt that continuous use had adversely affected some of the sites, and would like to see them restored.

Some people told us that they do not believe camping is appropriate in a national wildlife refuge, especially if site development or intensive use adversely affect natural habitat. Others expressed concern that the remote sites only encourage inexperienced boaters to get out onto the lake and jeopardize their safety and that of others.

#### *7. How will we manage outfitters and guides on the refuge?*

We heard a range of opinions about the desirability of the current level of guided or group tours which occur on adjacent ownerships. Several individuals expressed concern that guided tours have increased over the last five years, but do not appear to be regulated by any agency. Some of the same people believe that outfitting and guiding is already at its capacity, and opposed group tours because they facilitate getting more visitors to the lake and its surroundings. Others supported guiding as an activity, because it was their livelihood, or because they believe it enhances visitors' experiences by providing safe and successful opportunities for viewing wildlife, photographing nature, hunting, or fishing.

According to Federal regulations and Service compatibility policy (603 FW 2), we may only authorize public or private economic uses of the natural resources on any national wildlife refuge in accordance with 16 U.S.C. 715s and 50 C.F.R. 1(29.1) when we determine that the use contributes to the achievement of the refuge purposes or the Refuge System mission. We may authorize an economic use, such as commercially guided trips, by special use permit only when the refuge manager has determined the use is appropriate and compatible. The permit must contain terms, conditions, and stipulations to ensure compatibility.

Our authority to administer these activities on Umbagog Lake is limited to the lands and waters where the Service has an ownership interest. We have not evaluated these activities because we have had no requests to do so. Once a request is received, we will evaluate the use for appropriateness and compatibility.

#### *8. What should be the refuge role in conserving land in the Upper Androscoggin River watershed? Should we pursue a refuge expansion?*

Goal 6 describes significant changes in land use in the Northern Forest and our role in the existing collaborative partnership helping to conserve important



habitats, maintain outdoor recreational opportunities, and sustain a viable economic and social quality of life. Our partners and we will continue to use many tools and techniques for accomplishing this mission which range from outreach and education, research and demonstration areas, private lands assistance programs, cooperative management agreements, conservation easements, and land acquisition. Each of those is a tool, although our ability to use these effectively will depend on other factors previously discussed, such as refuge staffing, funding, and the continued strength and collaboration of our partnerships.

In that list of potential methods, land conservation garners the most public attention and interest. We heard a wide range of opinions on whether the refuge should continue to expand. Some people expressed concern that federal ownership will result in a greatly diminished local voice in how those lands are managed and used, and they expect the result will be additional restrictions on non-priority public uses, which they view as “traditional” uses. They believe the Service will not be responsive to local concerns, and that the lands will no longer be subject to local influences. Many people specifically fear a significant loss of commercial timber harvest and its potential impacts on the local economy. Others are concerned about the loss in property taxes, because the Federal Government does not pay property taxes.

However, many expressed support for land conservation for the reasons identified in goal 6 above, including the fact that owners are selling huge landholdings and subdividing them into smaller tracts at an alarming rate. Some people expressed the opinion that state agencies, local governments, or non-governmental entities should take the lead in land protection, and that the Service should play only a supporting role. Others suggested that the Service pursue conservation easements and private lands cooperative management agreements instead of fee simple purchases as a means of protection. They mentioned that this would also alleviate concerns about the impact on local property taxes.

On the other hand, we heard from many people that Service acquisition of fee title lands was the only way to guarantee the permanent conservation and management of the lands to support native wildlife. Some recognized the importance of the land conservation partnership and lands network that exists and encouraged our continued active involvement, including support for a refuge expansion. They mentioned the benefits of permanently conserving important habitats, the increased opportunities for public access and recreation in areas either not currently open or not guaranteed to be open long-term. Finally, they pointed out that expanding the refuge would maintain the rural character and quality of life so important to many.

*9. How can the refuge and its staff be an asset for local communities and support their respective vision and goals for the area?*

Our goal is to become an integral part of the economic and social health and vitality of local and regional communities. The challenge for us is to understand the visions of the respective communities and our role in them while staying true to our mission. We need to determine how best to cultivate relationships in the area, reach out to raise our visibility, and identify the resources we have to contribute. During public scoping, the comments we heard and the results of our stakeholder survey indicate some disappointment in the level of communication from refuge staff, and various levels of mistrust of what our agency does communicate.

Others mentioned that this situation is improving, but could be better. Several individuals requested a more transparent planning process with frequent opportunities to participate and share information. Others felt well informed about refuge activities, and valued the contribution of the refuge to their quality of life. Gaining community understanding, trust, and support for refuge programs is very important for our success in managing the refuge and contributing to conservation in the Northern Forest.

*10. What staffing, budgets, and facilities are needed to effectively administer the refuge? Where should they be located?*

Many people expressed concern about our ability to maintain existing and proposed infrastructure and implement programs on this refuge, given its current levels of staffing and funding. Some told us they recognize the logistical challenges for our four field staff in trying to manage the refuge land base, which straddles two states, is difficult to access in some places, and is significantly affected by Umbagog Lake and Errol Dam, neither of which falls under the direct authority of the Service. Fortunately, our strong partnerships with natural resource agencies in New Hampshire and Maine allow us to resolve most concerns expeditiously.

Some people expressed the opinion that the refuge needs a presence directly on the lakeshore to facilitate administration, outreach, and education of visitors on safety, lake use etiquette, and resource protection.



© Robert Quinn

*Whaleback Pond*

We also heard interest in insuring that there is adequate law enforcement capability on refuge lands. That is increasingly becoming a concern to many as public use on the refuge and adjacent lands increases. Our hope is that our new half-time refuge law enforcement officer and a full-time law enforcement zone officer shared among the refuges in Maine, northern New Hampshire and Vermont will meet our law enforcement needs and public expectations.

Some people are concerned that any new proposals in this CCP will fall substantially above current budget allocations, thus raising unrealistic expectations. One individual emphasized the point that our budgets can vary widely from year to year because they depend on annual Congressional appropriations. Other people supported our pursuit of new management objectives and strategies in the hope that the CCP results in new partnerships and sources of funding. In fact, several people made specific recommendations on sources of grants or ways to collaborate in certain programs or fund new infrastructure and other projects.

*11. What actions can Service staff implement on refuge lands to minimize the projected impacts from global and regional climate change?*

Climate change is an issue of increasing public concern because of its potential effects on land, water, and biological resources. The issue was pushed to the forefront in 2007 when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

(IPCC), representing the world's leading climate scientists, concluded that it is "unequivocal" that the Earth's climate is warming, and that it is "very likely" (a greater than 90 percent certainty) that the heat-trapping emissions from the burning of fossil fuels and other human activities have caused "most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-twentieth century" (IPCC 2007). The Northeast is already experiencing rising temperatures, with potentially dramatic warming expected later this century under some model predictions. According to the Northeast Climate Impacts Assessment team, "continued warming, and more extensive climate-related changes to come could dramatically alter the region's economy, landscape, character, and quality of life" (NECIA 2007).

Other predicted climate-related changes, beyond warming temperatures, include changing patterns of precipitation, significant acceleration of sea level rise, changes in season lengths, decreasing range of nighttime versus daytime temperatures, declining snowpack, and increasing frequency and intensity of severe weather events (TWS 2004). Since wildlife species are closely adapted to their environments, they must respond to climate variations, and the subsequent changes in habitat conditions, or they will not survive. Unfortunately, the challenge for wildlife is all the more complicated by increases in other environmental stressors such as pollution, land use developments, ozone depletion, exotic species, and disease. Wildlife researchers and professionals, sportsmen, and other wildlife enthusiasts are encouraging positive and preemptive action by land managers. Some recommendations for action include: reducing or eliminating those environmental stressors to the extent possible; managing lands to reduce risk of catastrophic events; managing for self-sustaining populations; and, looking for opportunities to ensure widespread habitat availability (TWS 2004).

Many wildlife professionals and conservation organizations recommend we manage refuge lands using an adaptive management framework, and increase biological monitoring and inventories. These two actions are critically important for land managers to undertake in order to effectively respond to the uncertainty of future climate change effects. Ultimately, we hope management will reduce environmental stressors, provide support for self-sustaining populations, and ensure widespread habitat availability through land protection and conservation.

## Other Issues

Management objectives and strategies in the CCP were also developed to address the following issues which tended to have a narrower range of divergent opinion on how to deal with them.

- What should be the Service role in protecting national and local landmarks, and cultural resources in the Umbagog Lake area?
- What is the refuge role with respect to water level management in Umbagog and associated lakes?
- How can the refuge promote responsible use of Umbagog Lake in cooperation with other jurisdictional and management agencies?
- How will existing camp lease agreements, under special use permits (SUPs), be affected by the CCP process?
- How will we protect and manage deer winter yards?
- How will we coordinate resource management with other state and federal agencies in the Upper Androscoggin River watershed?

**Issues Outside the Scope of this Analysis or Not Completely Within the Jurisdiction of the Service**

- How can we work with other agencies to manage invasive plants and animals (e.g. small mouth bass and milfoil) on the lake?
- How will we manage fires (management-prescribed burns and wildland fires) on the refuge?

*1. Changing the timeline for FERC re-licensing of Errol Dam or changing the terms and conditions of the license*

Some people expressed concerns with water level management in Umbagog Lake, namely due to the management of Errol Dam. We heard concerns with water levels being too high, affecting waterbird breeding and nesting habitat. Others mentioned concerns with low water levels during the summer, exposing mudflats and affecting shoreline access to open water. Yet others indicated that if the Service or states had more control over water level management, habitat conditions for species of concern, and wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, could be enhanced throughout the year.

Water levels are controlled, as noted above, by the holder of the license issued by FERC for the Errol Project (currently FPLE). Once FERC has issued a license, any party wanting FERC to change the terms must petition FERC to reopen the license in order to effectuate any change in its terms. The procedure for doing so requires the petitioner to supply a detailed administrative record justifying a change in the license terms, sufficient to convince FERC that the analysis it did in issuing the license is no longer accurate, and that a change in the license terms is necessary. The licensee has a right to full administrative process under FERC regulations before its license can be changed by that agency. Such a challenge falls outside the scope of this CCP. Its purpose is to provide the Service with detailed goals and objectives for managing refuge lands, not to provide guidance to the Service concerning matters within the jurisdiction of a different federal agency. However, we plan to continue to meet annually with the licensee to discuss current terms and conditions of the license that relate to wildlife management during the breeding and nesting seasons and to discuss opportunities for habitat enhancement throughout the year.

The timeline for FERC re-licensing is also beyond the control of the Service, and hence beyond the scope of the CCP. The current FERC license for the Errol Project is due to expire in 2023, at approximately the same time the CCP is scheduled for revision. Prior to 2023, the Service will begin the CCP revision process and be involved in the process for a renewal of the FERC license (assuming the licensee pursues this). This CCP is not intended to control either the Service's opinions in the next planning cycle or its position before FERC in re-licensing, although actions taken under the CCP may affect environmental baseline conditions for both processes.

*2. Giving or transferring refuge lands back to private or town ownership*

We heard people express the opinion that the Service should give back, trade, or sell refuge lands to an entity more amenable to the local culture and history. The USGS stakeholder survey (Sexton et al. 2005) indicates that some local respondents do not trust the Federal Government to manage lands on their behalf. Issue 8 above identifies other concerns people expressed about Service ownership.

We established the refuge in 1992 with the first purchase of land after producing a draft and final EA (Service 1991). Both of these documents extensively evaluated the proposal to create the refuge, and alternatives to that proposal, and included public review and comment. We based that proposal on a strong

federal-state partnership to cooperatively protect and manage nationally significant habitats in the area, with strong collaboration among the Service, New Hampshire and Maine state agencies, conservation organizations, and three principal landowners: the James River Company, Boise Cascades Paper Group, and Seven Islands Land Company. We agreed the Service was to take the lead in establishing the refuge on core lands, and New Hampshire and Maine were to take the lead in acquiring conservation easements in adjacent agreed-upon areas.

In addition to the 1991 Final EA establishing the refuge, our 2001 Regional Director's decision to further expand the refuge addressed public and partner comments on land acquisition. Both decisions required the Regional Director to prepare a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to disclose that the proposed land acquisition complies with federal laws and does not have a significant effect on the human environment.

The purchase of lands within the approved acquisition boundary represents the Service commitment to honor its responsibilities agreed to in the final decision. Although the Service can exchange refuge land for other land of equal or higher conservation value, a lack of trust in the Federal Government does not constitute a basis for transferring refuge lands to private or town ownership.